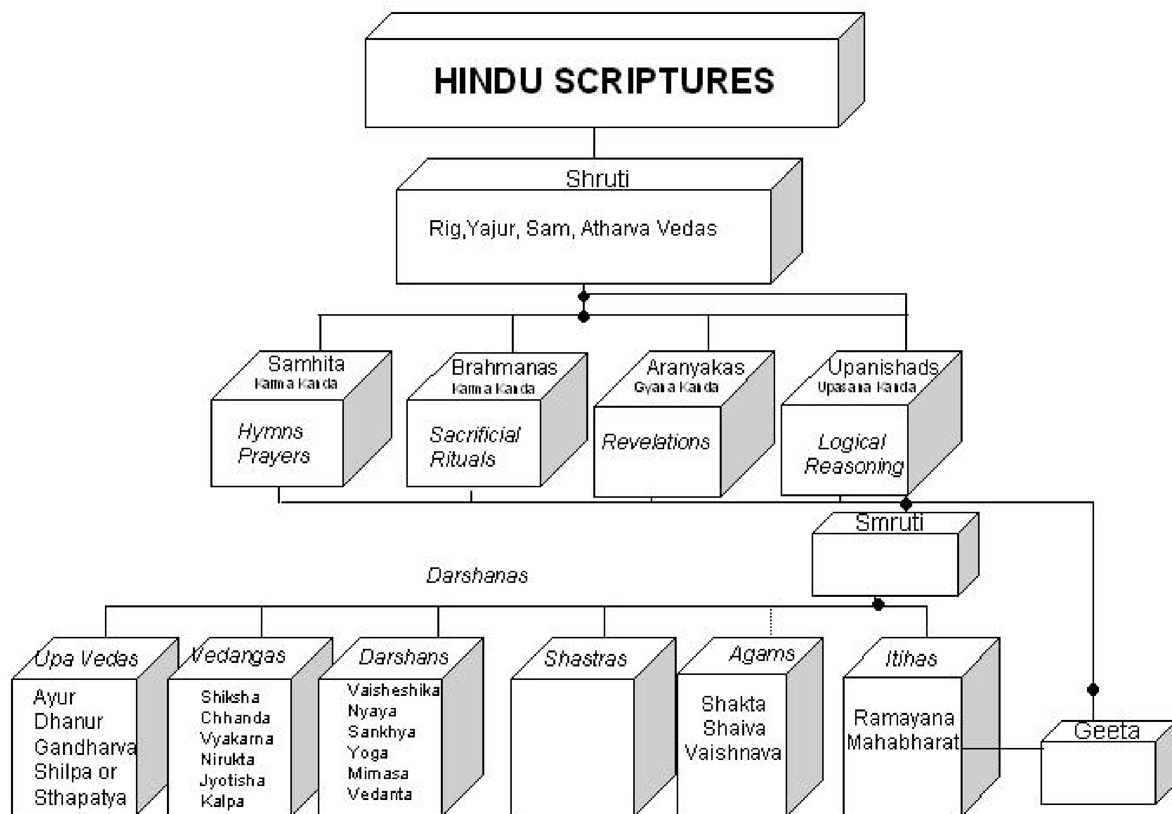
Varna Ashram
and
Hindu Scriptures





Building Blocks of Vedic Dharma

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1. Introduction

The 'Varna' popularly known as the 'Caste system' is perhaps the most explosive topics in Hinduism, which so often gives handle to Non-Hindus to bash Hinduism. Popular misconceptions say that the Vedic religion encourages division of human beings based on one's birth. As a result, some people have been kept backward and uneducated while others have abused this misconceptions and misinformation for personal gains. Much of this misconception can be attributed to the use of the words 'Varna' and 'Jaati' interchangeably. A closer analysis will reveal just how wrong these misconceptions are.

1.1. Caste

"The word caste is not a word that is indigenous to India. It originates in the Portuguese word casta which means race, breed, race or lineage. However, during the 19th century, the term caste increasingly took on the connotations of the word race. Thus, from the very beginning of western contact with the subcontinent European constructions have been imposed on Indian systems and institutions. The caste system had been a fascination of the British since their arrival in India. Coming from a society that was divided by class, the British attempted to equate the caste system to the class system. As late as 1937 Professor T. C. Hodson stated that: "Class and caste stand to each other in the relation of family to species. The general classification is by classes, the detailed one by castes. The former represents the external, the latter the internal view of the social organization." The difficulty with definitions such as this is that class is based on political and economic factors, caste is not. Caste was seen as the essence of Indian society, the system through which it was possible to classify all of the various groups of indigenous people according to their ability, as reflected by caste, to be of service to the British. It was not until 1872 that a planned comprehensive census was attempted. This was done under the direction of Henry Beverely, Inspector General of Registration in Bengal. The census went well beyond counting heads or even enquiring into sex ratios or general living conditions. Among the many questions were enquiries regarding nationality, race, tribe, religion and caste**."** (from The Indian Caste System and the British, by Kevin Hobson).

1.2. Varna

The root word for Varna is 'Vri' which means one's occupation. The Varna Dharma was based on division of labor. This division was solely based on the attitude of an individual and his/her propensity for performing certain duties according to Gunas (qualities). There are three Gunas - Sattva (white), Rajas (red), and Tamas (black).

1.3. Jaati

The Root word for 'jati' is 'jan', which means Birth.

1.4. The Issue

The issue of Varna Dharma is highly misunderstood. There are many issues and reasons for the decline of Varna Dharma. A key point in the Varna Dharma is the definition and Gunas associated with various classes of Varnas. This paper deals with following two main issues;

- Definition and duties of the Varna Dharma
- Basis of division - Gunas or birth

2. Supremacy of Vedas

First part in the understanding of Varna Dharma is to accept supremacy of Vedas in all the Hindu scriptures. As Swami Vivekanand said "**The Vedas are our only authority**, thus says the Shukla Yajur Veda (XXVI, 2). The Samritis, Puranas, Tantras – all these are acceptable as far as they agree the Vedas; and wherever they are contradictory, they are to be rejected as unreliable". (page 457, The Religion we are born in, volume 3, The complete works of Swami Vivekanand).

Even **Manu Samriti** declares that the Vedas are the supreme authority.

२ ।१३ अर्थकामेष्वसक्तानां धर्मज्ञानं विधीयते ।

२ ।१३ धर्मं जिज्ञासमानानां प्रमाणं परमं श्रुतिः ॥

The knowledge of the sacred law is prescribed for those who are not given to the acquisition of wealth and to the gratification of their desires; to those who seek the knowledge of the sacred law the supreme authority s the revelation (Sruti).

3. What Constitutes Vedic Knowledge

The second part in the understanding of Varna Dharma is what constitutes **Vedic knowledge**. Nirukta says on this topic;

स्थाणुरयं भारहारः किलाभूदधीत्य वेदं न विजानाति योऽर्थम् ।
योऽर्थज्ञ इत्सकलं भद्रमश्नुते नाकमेति ज्ञानविधूतपाप्मा ॥ निरुक्त १ । १८ ॥

"He, who reads the Vedas even with proper accents, but does not know their meanings, is like a tree weighed down by its fruit, branches, leaves and flowers, or like a beast of burden carrying on its back grain which it can not eat. But he, who understands their meanings and acts up to their teachings by avoiding sin and leading a virtuous life, enjoys perfect happiness in this world, and eternal bliss hereafter in consequence thereof", Nirukta 1, 18 (translation from Stayarth Prakash, page 71).

Once supremacy of Vedas and the meanings of Vedic education are understood, all the doubts about Varna Dharma will evaporate. There is no division in Vedic knowledge. The division is in our ignorance.

4. Origin of Varnas

The first reference to the origin of Varna Dharma comes from the Rig Veda and subsequently explained in the Gita and Samritis (e.g. Manu, Prashar etc.).

4.1 Rig Veda

The Purusa Sukta has the first reference to the origin of four groups.

ब्रा`ह्म`णो ऽस्य` मुख॑म् आसीद् बारा॑जकृ ।

ऊ`रू तद् अ॑स्ययद् वै॑श्यः पशू॑अजायत ॥ १००९०१२

"The Brahmana (spiritual wisdom and splendour) was His Mouth; the Kshatriya (administrative and military prowess) His Arms became. His Thighs the Vaisya (commercial and business enterprise) was; of His Feet the Sudra (productive and sustaining force) was born." (by Swami Krishnananda The Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India)

4.2 Gita

The Gita elaborates on the origin of Varnas.

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।

तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ ४-१३ ॥

"The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of quality (*Guna)* and work *(karma)*; though I am its creator, know Me to be incapable of action or change." (from The Bhagavad Gita by S. Radhakrishnan)

5 Definition and Duties of Varnas

5.1 Tejabindupanishad

मुनीनां तत्त्वयुक्तं तु न देवा न परं विदुः ।

लोभं मोहं भयं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं च किल्बिषम् । १२ ॥

शीतोष्णं क्षुत्पिपासं च संकल्पं च विकल्पकम् ।

न ब्रह्मकुलदर्पं च न मुक्तिं ग्रन्थसंचयम् ॥ १३ ॥

"Brahman (the Supreme Reality) is not known to those who are possessed of avarice, delusion, fear, egotism, lust, anger, and sin or possessed of (unable to bear) heat and cold, hunger and thirst, or mental resolve and indecision, or pride of birth in a Brahmin (priest) family, or vanity in having read a mass of books on Mukti (liberation or salvation)."

5.2 Gita

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।

सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात्त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४० ॥

"There is no being on earth, or again in heaven among the gods, that is liberated from the three qualities (Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas) born of Nature."

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४१ ॥

"Of Brahmanas, Kshtriyas and Vaishyas, as also the Sudras, O Arjuna, the duties are distributed according to the qualities born of their own nature."

शमो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४२

"Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also uprightness, knowledge, realization and belief in God are the duties of **the Brahmanas**, born of their own nature."

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।

दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४३ ॥

"Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity and also not fleeing from battle, generosity and lordliness are the duties of **Kshatriyas**, born of their own nature."

कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४४ ॥

"Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade are the duties of the **Vaishya** merchant class), born of their own nature; and action consisting of service is the duty of the **Sudras**, born of their own nature."

(All meanings from Srimad Bhagavad Gita by Swami Chinmayananda)

6 Varna by Birth

The next issue in the Varna system is to understand the order and how to belong to one Varna. Is it by birth or by 'guna'.

6.1 Channdogaya Upnishad

The following story (Channdogaya Upnishad, 4.1.4) reveals that Brahminhood does not depend on birth but on character and Gunas.

सत्यकामो ह जाबालो जबालां मातरमामन्त्रयांचक्रे
ब्रह्मचर्यं भवति विवत्स्यामि किंगोत्रो न्वहमस्मीति
॥ ४.४.१॥
सा हैनमुवाच नाहमेतद्वेद तात यद्गोत्रस्त्वमसि
बह्वहं चरन्ती परिचारिणी यौवने त्वामलभे
साहमेतन्न वेद यद्गोत्रस्त्वमसि जबाला तु नामाहमस्मि
सत्यकामो नाम त्वमसि स सत्यकाम एव जाबालो
ब्रुवीथा इति ॥ ४.४.२॥
स ह हारिद्रुमतं गौतममेत्योवाच ब्रह्मचर्यं भगवति
वत्स्याम्युपेयां भगवन्तमिति ॥ ४.४.३॥
तं होवाच किंगोत्रो नु सोम्यासीति स होवाच
नाहमेतद्वेद भो यद्गोत्रोऽहमस्म्यपृच्छं मातरं
सा मा प्रत्यब्रवीद्बह्वहं चरन्ती परिचारिणी यौवने
त्वामलभे साहमेतन्न वेद यद्गोत्रस्त्वमसि जबाला तु
नामाहमस्मि सत्यकामो नाम त्वमसीति सोऽहं
सत्यकामो जाबालोऽस्मि भो इति ॥ ४.४.४॥
तं होवाच नैतदब्राह्मणो विवक्तुमर्हति समिधं
सोम्याहरोप त्वा नेष्ये न सत्यादगा इति तमुपनीय
कृशानामबलानां चतुःशता गा निराकृत्योवाचेमाः
सोम्यानुसंव्रजेति ता अभिप्रस्थापयन्नुवाच
नासहस्रेणावर्तेयेति स ह वर्षगणं प्रोवास ता यदा
सहस्रं संपेदुः ॥ ४.४.५॥

"Satyakama, the son of Jabala, addressed his mother and said "I wish to become a brahmacarin, mother. Of what family am I?" She said to him: I donot know, my child, of what family thou art. In my youth, when I had to move about much as a servant, I conceived thee. So I donot know of what family thou art. I am Jabala by name. Thou art Satyakama. Say that thouart Satyakama Jabala."

He going to Gautama, the son of Haridrumat, said to him: I wish to become a brahmacarin with thee, Sire. May I come to you?"

He said to him, "Of what family art thou, my friend?"

He replied: "I donot know, Sire, of what family I am. I asked my mother, and she answered: "In my youth, when I had to move about much as a servant, I conceived thee. So I donot know of what family thou art. I am Jabala by name. Thou art Satyakama.' I am therefore Satyakama Jabala, Sire."

He said to him" "No one but a true Brahmin would speak out. Go and fetch fuel, I shall initiate thee. Thou has not swerved from the truth."

6.2 Vajra Suchikopanishad

॥ श्री गुरुभ्यो नमः हरिः ॐ ॥

यज्ज्ञानाद्यान्ति मुनयो ब्राह्मण्यं परमाद्भुतम् ।

तत्रैपद्ब्रह्मतत्त्वमहमस्मीति चिंतये ॥

ॐ आप्यायन्त्विति शान्तिः ॥

चित्सदानन्दरूपाय सर्वधीवृत्तिसाक्षिणे ।

नमो वेदान्तवेद्याय ब्रह्मणेऽनन्तरूपिणे ॥

ॐ वज्रसूचीं प्रवक्ष्यामि शास्त्रमज्ञानभेदनम् ।

दूषणं ज्ञानहीनानां भूषणं ज्ञानचक्षुषाम् ॥ १ ॥

ब्राह्मक्षत्रियवैष्यशूद्रा इति चत्वारो वर्णास्तेषां वर्णानां ब्राह्मण एव प्रधान इति वेदवचनानुरूपं स्मृतिभिरप्युक्तम् ।

तत्र चोद्यमस्ति को वा ब्राह्मणो नाम किं जीवः किं देहः किं जातिः किं ज्ञानं किं कर्म किं धार्मिक इति ॥

तत्र प्रथमो जीवो ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । अतीतानागतानेकदेहानां जीवस्यैकरूपत्वात् एकस्यापि कर्मवशादनेकदेहसंभवात् सर्वशरीराणां जीवस्यैकरूपत्वाच्च । तस्मात् न जीवो ब्राह्मण इति ॥

तर्हि देहो ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । आचाण्डालादिपर्यन्तानां मनुष्याणां पञ्चभौतिकत्वेन देहस्यैकरूपत्वात्

जरामरणधर्माधर्मादिसाम्यदर्शनत् ब्राह्मणः श्वेतवर्णः क्षत्रियो रक्तवर्णो वैश्यः पीतवर्णः शूद्रः कृष्णवर्णः इति नियमाभावात् ।

पित्रादिशरीरदहने पुत्रादीनां ब्रह्महत्यादिदोषसंभवाच्च ।

तस्मात् न देहो ब्राह्मण इति ॥

तर्हि जाति ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । तत्र

जात्यन्तरजन्तुष्वनेकजातिसंभवात् महर्षयो बहवः सन्ति ।

ऋष्यशृङ्गो मृग्याः कौशिकः कुशात् जाम्बूको जाम्बूकात् वल्मीको वाल्मीकात् व्यासः कैवर्तकन्यकायाम् शशपृष्ठात् गौतमः वसिष्ठ उर्वश्याम् अगस्त्यः कलशे जात इति शृतत्वात् । एतेषा जात्या विनाप्यग्रे ज्ञानप्रतिपादिता ऋषयो बहवः सन्ति । तस्मात् न जाति ब्राह्मण इति ॥

I now proceed to declare the vajrasuuchi - the weapon that is the destroyer of ignorance- which condemns the ignorant and praises the man of divine vision.

There are four castes - the braahmaNa, the kshatriya, the vaishya, and the shudra. Even the smritis declare in accordance with the words of the vedas that the braahmaNa alone is the most important of them. **Then this needs to be examined. What is meant by the braahmaNa ? Is it a jiiva ? Is it a body ? Is it a class ? It is GYAna ? Is it karma ? Or is it a doer of Dharma ?**

To begin with : **is jiiva the braahmaNa** ? No. Since the jiva is the same in the many past and future bodies (of all persons), and since the jiiva is the same in all of the many bodies obtained through the force of karma, there jiiva is not the braahmaNa.

Then is the body the braahmaNa ? No. Since the body, as it is made up of the five elements, is the same for all people down to chaNdAla-s, etc., since old age and death, dharma and adharma are found to be common to them all, since there is no absolute distinction that the braahmaNas are white-colored, the kshatriyas red, the vaishyas yellow, and the shudras dark, and since in burning the corpse of his father, etc., the stain of the murder of a braahmaNa, etc., will accrue to the son, etc., therefore the body is not the braahmaNa.

Then is a class the braahmaNa ? No. Since many rishis have sprung from other castes and orders of creation - RishyashRi.nga was born of deer; kaushika, of kusha grass; jaambuka of a jackal; vaalmiki of valmiika (an ant-hill); vyaasa of a fisherman's daughter; gautama, of the posteriors of a hare; vasishtha of uurvasi (a celestial nymph in the court of Indra); and agastya of a water-pot; thus have we heard. Of these, many rishis outside the caste have stood first among the teachers of divine wisdom; therefore a class is not the braahmaNa.

Is GYAna the braahmaNa ? No. Since there were many kshatriyas and others well versed in the cognition of divine Truth, therefore GYAna is not the braahmaNa.

तर्हि ज्ञानं ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । क्षत्रियादयोऽपि परमार्थदर्शिनोऽभिज्ञा बहवः सन्ति । तस्मात् न ज्ञानं ब्राह्मण इति ॥

तर्हि कर्म ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । सर्वेषां प्राणिनां प्रारब्धसञ्चितागामिकर्मसाधर्म्यदर्शनात्कर्माभिप्रेरिताः सन्तो जनाः क्रियाः कुर्वन्तीति । तस्मात् न कर्म ब्राह्मण इति ॥

तर्हि धार्मिको ब्राह्मण इति चेत् तन्न । क्षत्रियादयो हिरण्यदातारो बहवः सन्ति । तस्मात् न धार्मिको ब्राह्मण इति ॥

तर्हि को वा ब्रह्मणो नाम । यः कश्चिदात्मानमद्वितीयं जातिगुणक्रियाहीनं षडूर्मिषड्भावेत्यादिसर्वदोषरहितं सत्यज्ञानानन्दानन्तस्वरूपं स्वयं निर्विकल्पमशेषकल्पाधारमशेषभूतान्तर्यामित्वेन वर्तमानमन्तर्यहिश्चाकाशवदनुस्यूतमखण्डानन्दस्वभावमप्रमेयं अनुभवैकवेद्यमपरोक्षतया भासमानं करतळामलकवत्साक्षादपरोक्षीकृत्य कृतार्थतया कामरागादिदोषरहितः शमदमादिसंपन्नो भाव मात्सर्य तृष्णा आशा मोहादिरहितो दम्भाहङ्कारदिभिरसंस्पृष्टचेता वर्तत एवमुक्तलक्षणो यः स एव ब्राह्मणेति शृतिस्मृतीतिहासपुराणाभ्यामभिप्रायः अन्यथा हि ब्राह्मणत्वसिद्धिर्नास्त्येव । सच्चिदानान्दमात्मानमद्वितीयं ब्रह्म भावयेदित्युपनिषत् ॥

ॐ आप्यायन्त्विति शान्तिः ॥

॥ इति वज्रसूच्युपनिषत्समाप्ता ॥

॥ भारतीरमणमुख्यप्राणंतर्गत श्रीकृष्णार्पणमस्तु ॥

Then **is karma the braahmaNa** ? No. Since the praarabdha, sanchita, aagami karmas are the same for all beings, and since all people perform their actions impelled by karma, therefore karma is not the braahmaNa.

Then is the doer of dharma (virtuous actions) the braahmaNa ? No. Since there are many kshatriyas, etc., who are givers of gold, therefore a doer of virtuous actions is not the braahmaNa.

Who indeed then is braahmaNa ? Whoever he may be, he who has directly realised his aatmaa and who is directly cognizant, like the myrobalan in his palm, of his aatmaa, that is without a second, that is devoid of class and actions, that is free from the faults of the six stains (hunger, thirst, grief, confusion, old age, and death) and the six changes (birth, existence etc), that is of the nature of truth, knowledge, bliss and eternity, that is without any change in itself, that is the substratum of all the kalpas, that exists penetrating all things that pervades everything within and without as aakaash, that is of nature of undivided bliss, that cannot be reasoned about and that is known only by direct cognition. He who by the reason of having obtained his wishes is devoid of the faults of thirst after worldly objects and passions, who is the possessor of the qualifications beginning with saama (dama, uparati, titikshaa, samadhana, sraddha), who is free from emotion, malice, thirst after worldly objects, desire, delusion, etc., whose mind is untouched by pride, egoism, etc., who possesses all these qualities and means- he only is the braahmaNa.

Such is the opinion of the veda, the smritis, the itihaasa, and the puraaNa-s. Otherwise one cannot obtain the status of a brahmaNa. One should meditate on his aatma as sachchidaananda, and the non-dual brahman. Yea, one should meditate on his aatma as the sachchidaananda brahman. Such is the upanishhad.

UM tat.h sat.h

vajrasUchikA upanishhad.hSend corrections to H.P. Raghunandan hpraghu@genius.tisl.soft.net
OR Shrisha Rao shrao@nyx.net, TranslationSend corrections to mgiridhar@ucdavis.edu

“This is the translation of vajrasuuchi upanishhad of saamaveda. Vajrasuuchi means diamond needle. This translation is taken from the book `Thirty Minor upanishads' translated by Narayanasvami Aiyar and is published by the Adyar Press, Madras.

7 Right to study Vedas

Contrary to existing view everyone irrespective of caste or sex, has right to read the Veda or hear it read.

7.1 Yajur Veda

यथेमां वाचं कल्याणीमावदानि जनेभ्यः । ब्रह्मराजन्याभ्यां शूद्राय
चार्याय च स्वाय चारणाय ॥ यजु० । अ० २६ । २ ॥

"As I have given this Word (i.e. the four Vedas) which is the word of salvation for all making – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sudras, women, servants, aye, even the lowest of the low, so shoul you all do, i.e. teach and preach Veda. Let all men therefore read and recite, teach, and preach the Veda and thereby acquire true knowledge, practice virtue, shun vice, and consequently being freed from all sorrow and pain, enjoy true happiness." 26,2 (translated from Sayarth Prakash, Ch 3, page 78).

7.2 Atharva Veda

ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या३ युवानं विन्दते पतिम् ॥ अथर्व० ॥ कां० ११ । प्र० १६ ।
अ० ३ । मं० १८ ॥

"Just as boys acquire sound knowledge and culture by the practice of Brahmacharya and then marry girls of their own choice, who are young, well educated, loving and of like temperament, so should a girl practice Brahmacharya, study the Veda and other sciences and there by perfect her knowledge, refine her character, give her hand to a man of her own choice, who is young, learned and loving." (Xl, xvi, 3, 18.) (translated from Sayarth Prakash, Ch 3, page 79).

7.3 Brahma-Sutras

"Apasudradhikaranam: Topic 9 (Sutras 34-38)

The right of the Sudras to the study of Vedas discussed

शुगस्य तदनादरश्रवणात् तदाद्रवणात् सूच्यते हि

Sugasya tadanadarasravanat tadadravanat suchyate hi I.3.34 (97)

Suk: grief; Asya: his; Tat: that, namely that grief; Anadarasravanat: from hearing his (the Rishi's) disrespectful speech; Tada: then; Adravanat: because of going to him i.e, to Raikva; Suchyate: is referred to; Hi: because.

(King Janasruti) was in grief on hearing some contemptuous words used about him by the sage in the form of a swan; owing to his approaching Raikva, overwhelming with that grief, Raikva called him Sudra; for it (the grief) is pointed at by Raikva.

The Purvapakshin says: The Sudras also have got bodies and desires. Hence they are also entitled. Raikva refers to Janasruti who wishes to learn from him by the name of Sudra. "Fie,

necklace and carriage be thine, O Sudra, together with the cows" Chh. Up. IV-2 & 3. But when he appears a second time, Raikva accepts his presents and teaches him. Smriti speaks of Vidura and others who were born from Sudra mothers as possessing highest knowledge. Therefore the Sudra has a claim to Brahma Vidya or knowledge of Brahman. This Sutra refutes the view and denies the right to the study of the Vedas for Sudra. The word 'Sudra' does not denote a Sudra by birth which is its conventional meaning, because Janasruti was a Kshatriya king. Here we will have to take the etymological meaning of the word which is, "He rushed into grief (Sukam abhi dudrava) or as "grief rushed on him" or as "he in his grief rushed to Raikva". The following Sutra also intimates that he was a Kshatriya.

क्षत्रियत्वगतेश्चोत्तरत्र चैत्ररथेन लिङ्गात्

shatriyatvavagateschottaratra chaitrarathena lingat I.3.35 (98)

Kshatriyatva: the state of his being a Kshatriya; **Avagateh:** on account of being known or understood; **Cha:** and; **Uttaratra:** latter on in a subsequent part of the text; **Chaitrarathena:** with Chaitraratha; **Lingat:** because of the indicatory sign or the inferential mark.

And because the Kshatriyahood (of Janasruti) is known from the inferential mark (supplied by his being mentioned) later on with Chaitraratha (who was a Kshatriya himself).

An argument in support of Sutra 34 is given. Janasruti is mentioned with the Kshatriya Chaitraratha Abhipratarin in connection with the same Vidya. Hence we can infer that Janasruti also was a Kshatriya because, as a rule, equals are mentioned together with equals. Hence the Sudras are not qualified for the knowledge of Brahman.

संस्कारपरामर्शात् तदभावाभिलापाच्च

Samskaraparamarsat tadabhavabhilapacca (I.3.36) (99)

Samskara: the purificatory ceremonies, the investiture with sacred thread; Paramarsat: because of the reference; Tat: that ceremony; Abhava: absence; Abhilapat: because of the declaration; Cha: and.

Because purificatory ceremonies are mentioned (in the case of the twice-born) and their absence is declared (in the case of the Sudra).

The discussion on the privilege of Brahma Vidya on the part of Sudras is continued. In different places of the Vidyas the Upanayana ceremony is referred to. The Upanayana ceremony is declared by the scriptures to be a necessary condition for the study of all kinds of knowledge or Vidya. We read in Prasna Up. I-1 "Devoted to Brahman, firm in Brahman, seeking for the highest Brahman they, carrying fuel in their hands, approached the venerable Pippalada, thinking that he would teach them all that." Upanayana ceremony is meant for the higher castes. With reference to the Sudras on the other hand, the absence of ceremonies is frequently mentioned in the scriptures. "In the Sudra there is not any sin by eating prohibited food, and he is not fit for any ceremony" Manu X-12-6. A Sudra by birth cannot have Upanayana and other Samskaras

without which the Vedas cannot be studied. Hence the Sudras are not entitled to the study of the Vedas. The next Sutra further strengthens the view that a Sudra can have no Samskara.

श्रवणाध्ययनार्थप्रतिषेधात् स्मृतेश्च

Sravanadhyayanarthapratishedhat smritescha I.3.38 (101)

Sravana: hearing; Adhyayana: studying; Artha: understanding; Pratishedhat: on account of the prohibition; Smriteh: in the Smriti; Cha: and. And on account of the prohibition in Smriti of (the Sudras) hearing, studying and understanding (the Veda) and performing Vedic rites (they are not entitled to the knowledge of Brahman).

[Note: Sutras 34-38 of Brahma-Sutras disqualify the Sudras for the Knowledge of Brahman (Supreme Reality) through the study of the Vedas. But it is possible for them to attain that Knowledge through the Puranas and the epics (Ramayana and the Mahabharata)."

Translation from Brahma Sutras by Swami Sivananda, The Divine Life Society, Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh.

"Wherever it is decalred (in the books of Rishis) that the Sudras are debarred from the study of the Veda, the prohibition simply amounts to this that he, that does not learn anything even after a good deal of teaching, being ignorant and destitute of understanding, is called a Sudra. It is useless for him to learn and for others to teach him any longer." Satyarth Prakash, chapter 3, 78.

8 Inter movement in Varna

Can people by their actions move from one Varna to another? The answer is YES, which is another argument in favor of Varna not based on birth.

8.1 Gita

(Translation of Srimad Bhagavad Gita by Swami Chinmayananda and Dr. R. Krishnan).

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।

स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥ १८-४५ ॥

"By following his qualities of work, every man can become perfect. Now please hear from Me how this can be done. (By A. C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada)."

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

"From Whom is the evolution of all beings, by Whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him with one's own duty, man attains Perfection. (by Swami Chinmayananda)"

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम्॥ १८-४७॥

"Better is one`s own duty (though) destitute of merits, than the duty of another well-performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin. (by Swami Chinmayananda)"

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत्।
सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः॥ १८-४८॥

"One should not give up the work suited to one's nature, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), though it may be defective, for all enterprises are clouded by defects as fire by smoke. (The Bhagavadgita by S. Radhakrishnan)."

8.2 Apastamba Sutras

"A low Class man may, by leading a virtuous life, rise to the level of a higher Class man and should be ranked as such. In like manner a high Class man can by leading a sinful life, sink down to the level of a Class lower than his, and should be considered as such." (Translation from Stayarth Prakash, chapter 4, page 100)

9 Manu Samriti

The scriptures are quoted out of context as if they are stand alone political statements. Manu Samriti is not very entertaining for Sudras is true, only when not understood properly. People take pride in quoting from Manu Samriti to show their knowledge and understanding, and also to put down Varna Dharma. A careful reading will give a different picture. Manu Samriti is very infamous for treatment of Sudras by popular belief. There are shlokas in Manu Samriti that debars a Sudra from learning any Vedic knowledge when read in isolation and not as one part of a scripture. The maximum damage to Varna Dharma was caused by piece meal acquisition and application of knowledge. Manu Samriti deals with all the four Varnas and not only Sudras. The first issue with Manu Samriti is what Vedic knowledge is and what different Varnas are.

9.1 Definitions and Duties of Varna

स्वाध्यायेन व्रतैर्होमैस्त्रैविद्येनेज्यया सुतैः।
महायज्ञैश्च यज्ञैश्च ब्राह्मीयं क्रियते तनुः॥२।२८

"The study of true sciences, the practice of Brahmacharya, the performance of Homa, the acceptance of truth and rejection of untruth, the dissemination of true knowledge, leading a virtuous life as enjoined by the Veda, the performance of seasonal Homa, the reproduction of good children, faithful discharge of the Five Great Daily Duties, and doing such other good works as are productive of beneficial results to the community, such as developing technical arts, association with the good and the learned, truthfulness in word, deed and thought, and devotion to public good and like, all these things go to make a Brahma

(***translation from Satyartparkash, chapter 4, page 96***)

१।८८ अध्यापनमध्ययनं यजनं याजनं तथा।

'१।८८ दानं प्रतिग्रहं चैव ब्राह्मणानामकल्पयत्॥

1,88. To Brahmanas he assigned teaching and studying (the Veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms).

१।८९ प्रजानां रक्षणं दानमिज्याऽध्ययनमेव च।

'१।८९ विषयेष्वप्रसक्तिश्च क्षत्रियस्य समासतः॥

1,89. The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures;

१।९० पशूनां रक्षणं दानमिज्याऽध्ययनमेव च।

'१।९० वणिक्पथं कुसीदं च वैश्यस्य कृषिमेव च॥

1,90. The Vaisya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land.

१।९१ एकमेव तु शूद्रस्य प्रभुः कर्म समादिशत्।

'१।९१ एतेषामेव वर्णानां शुश्रूषामनसूयया॥

1,91. One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Sudra, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.

9.2 Inter Movement of Varnas

१०।६५ शूद्रो ब्राह्मणतामेति ब्राह्मणश्चैति शूद्रताम्।

'१०।६५ क्षत्रियाज् जातमेवं तु विद्याद् वैश्यात् तथैव च॥

"As the son of a Sudra may attain the rank of a Brahmin if he were to possess his qualifications, character and accomplishments, and as the son of a Brahmin may become a Sudra, if he sinks to his level in his character, inclinations and manners, even so must it be with him who springs from a Kshatriya; even so with him who is born of a Vaishya. In other words, a person should be ranked with the Class whose qualifications, accomplishments, and character he possesses. (translation from Stayarth Prakash, chapter 4, page 99).

२।१६८ योऽनधीत्य द्विजो वेदमन्यत्र कुरुते श्रमम्।

'२।१६८ स जीवन्नेव शूद्रत्वमाशु गच्छति सान्वयः॥

"A Dwija as well his children who, instead of studying the Veda, wastes his time in doing other things soon goes down to the level of a Shudra." Manu Samriti 2, 168

२।१६८ योऽनधीत्य द्विजो वेदमन्यत्र कुरुते श्रमम्।

'२।१६८ स जीवन्नेव शूद्रत्वमाशु गच्छति सान्वयः॥

"A twice-born man who, not having studied the Veda, applies himself to other (and worldly study), soon falls, even while living, to the condition of a Sudra and his descendants (after him)." Manu Samriti 2, 168.

9.3 Special Treatment for Brahmans!!!

It is true that not very complementary and rude things were said about Sudras in Manu Samriti. But as shown in Manu Samriti (discussed in the definition section) that the position of Brahmin's was full of responsibility and not privileges.

८ ।३३७ अष्टापाद्यं तु शूद्रस्य स्तेये भवति किल्बिषम् ।

८ ।३३७ षोडशैव तु वैश्यस्य द्वात्रिंशत् क्षत्रियस्य च ॥

In (a case of) theft the guilt of a Sudra shall be eightfold, that of a Vaisya sixteen fold, that of a Kshatriya two-and-thirty fold,, 8,337

८ ।३३८ ब्राह्मणस्य चतुःषष्टिः पूर्णं वाऽपि शतं भवेत् ।

८ ।३३८ द्विगुणा वा चतुःषष्टिस्तद्दोषगुणविद् हि सः ॥

That of a Brahmana sixty-fourfold, or quite a hundredfold, or (even) twice four-and-sixtyfold; (each of them) knowing the nature of the offence. 8,338Guna or Birth – The Deciding Factor

१ ।१०९ आचाराद् विच्युतो विप्रो न वेदफलमश्नुते ।

१ ।१०९ आचारेण तु संयुक्तः सम्पूर्णफलभाग् भवेत् ॥

"A Brahmana who departs from the rule of conduct, does not reap the fruit of the Veda, but he who duly follows it, will obtain the full reward. (Manu Samriti 1,109)."

"Declares out Manu:

आददीत परां विद्यां प्रयत्नादवरादपि ।
अन्त्यादपि परं धर्मं स्त्रीरत्नं दुष्कुलादपि ।

Take the jewel of a woman for your wife, though she be of inferior descent. Learn supreme knowledge with service even from the man of low birth; and even from the Chandala, learn by serving him the way to salvation." From complete works of Swami Vivekananda, chapter The common bases of Hinduism, page 381.

10 Is breakdown in Varna unexpected?

10.1 Prashar Samriti

Smriti created by sage Parashar and known by his name as 'Parashar Smriti, is the most benevolent for the modern Kali Yuga. Parashar has himself said:

KRITE TU MANAVO DHARMASTRETAYAAM GAUTAMO SMRITAH ||
DWAPARE SHANKHALIKHITAA KALAU PARASHARAH SMRITAH ||

Meaning- Manu Smriti was most relevant in Satya Yuga. In Treta, Smriti created by Gautam had most relevance whereas in Dwapar, Shankh's Smriti was mostly recognized. But in Kali Yuga, it is Parashar Smriti that by and large shows the way to the ignorant people.

10.2 Sri Ramacharitamanasa

Sri Ramacharitamanasa, Uttar-kanda, verses 97 – 98, explains very clearly that what happened and happening to Varna Dharama.

चौ०— बरन धर्म नहिं आश्रम चारी। श्रुति बिरोध रत सब नर नारी॥
द्विज श्रुति बेचक भूप प्रजासन। कोउ नहिं मान निगम अनुसासन॥ १॥
मारग सोइ जा कहुँ जोइ भावा। पंडित सोइ जो गाल बजावा॥
मिथ्यारंभ दंभ रत जोई। ता कहुँ संत कहइ सब कोई॥ २॥
सोइ सयान जो परधन हारी। जो कर दंभ सो बड़ आचारी॥
जो कह झूँठ मसखरी जाना। कलिजुग सोइ गुनवंत बखाना॥ ३॥
निराचार जो श्रुति पथ त्यागी। कलिजुग सोइ ग्यानी सो बिरागी॥
जाकें नख अरु जटा बिसाला। सोइ तापस प्रसिद्ध कलिकाला॥ ४॥

"No one follows the duties of one's own caste, and the four Dharmas or stages of life also disappear. Every man and woman takes delight in revolting against the Vedas. The Brahmans sell the Vedas; the kings bleed their subjects; no one respects the injunction of the Vedas. The right course for every individual is that which one takes a fancy to; a man of erudition is he who plays the braggart. Whoever launches spurious undertakings and is given over to hypocrisy, him does everyone call a saint. He alone is clever, who robs another of his wealth; he who puts up false appearances is an ardent follower of established usage. He who is given to lying and is clever at joking is spoken of as a man of parts in the Kali age. He alone who is a reprobate and has abandoned the path of the Vedas is a man of wisdom and dispassion in the Kali age. He alone who has grown big nails and long locks of matted hair is a renowned ascetic in the Kali age. (1-4)"

11 What went wrong?

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (founder of Arya Samaj) has discussed this issue (downfall of Varna Dharma) very nicely in Satyarth Prakash and it states as:

"When the Braahmans became destitute of knowledge, there could be no talk of the ignorance of the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shoodras. Even the ancient practice of the study of the Vedas and other Shaastras with their meanings died away. The Braahmans only learnt the Vedas by note - just enough to enable them to earn their livelihood. Even that much they did teach to the Kshatriyas, and others.

As the ignorant became the teachers of the people, deceitfulness, fraud, hypocrisy, and irreligion began to increase among them. The Braahmans thought that they should make some arrangement for their livelihood. They held a council among themselves and agreed to preach to the Kshatriyas and others: "We alone are the object of worship to you. You could never enter Heaven or obtain salvation except by serving us. Should you not serve us, you shall fall into an awful Hell."

The Vedas, and the Shaastraas written by the Vedic sages and seers have declared men of learning and as Braahmans and worthy of respect; but here they, who were ignorant, lascivious,

deceitful, licentious, lazy and irreligious, declared themselves as Brahmans and worthy of homage. But how could the sterling virtues of the righteous, learned and truth-loving Brahmans be found in them. When the Kshatriyas and others became absolutely destitute of Sanskrit learning, whatever cock and bull stories the Braahmans concocted, the simpletons believed. They ensnared all in their net of hypocrisy, brought them under thorough control and began to teach:- "Whatever a Braahman declares is as infallible as words falling from Divine lip*s*." Satyaarth Prakash, By Swami Dayanand Saraswati, page 334, chapter 11.

12 Conclusions

The most important issue in the understanding of Varna Dharma is to understand the definitions of the various Varnas as explained in Hindu scriptures. The rules of the groups prescribe the duties to society. The duties for various Varnas were based on the 'guna' of an individual and were dependent on the capacities of individuals. Therefore the division of labor, which broadly falls into 'the four orders of human beings' is based upon "guna and karma" of each individual. The word 'guna' in Vedanta means Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas (Appendix Swami Chinmayanand).

"The complete definition of the Varna not only removes our present misunderstanding but also provides us with some data to understand its true significance**. Not by mere birth is man a Brahmana (Brahmin);** by cultivating good intentions and noble thoughts alone can we ever aspire to Brahmana-hood; nor can we pose as Brahmana merely because of our external physical marks, or bodily actions in the outer world. The definition insists that he alone is a Brahmana, whose thoughts are as much Sattvik, as his actions are. A Ksatriya is one who is Rajasik in his thoughts and actions. A Sudra is not only one whose thoughts are Tamasik, but he who lives a life of low endeavours, for satisfying his base animal passions and flesh-appetites. The scientific attitude in which this definition has been declared, is clear from the exhaustive implications of the statement: "According to the differentiation of 'guna' and 'karma'."

As discussed earlier, there was no exclusion of any Varna to read Vedic Knowledge in the Veda. Later on restriction were put on people because of with Tamsic Guna. There was a structured and step-wise approach to learning which everyone was supposed to follow. All Dwij's were following that system of learning. No Vedic knowledge was given even to Dwij's who donot follow the process of learning. With time this (not learning Vedas) became a rule in the society which led to consolidation of Vedic knowledge in very few peoples hand. If a tumbler is full of dirt, grease and other impurities, then it is an unfit receptacle for holding pure water. The mind is the container and if it is filled with Tamasic qualities, then it is an unfit receptacle for receiving pure spiritual knowledge.

"It is written in Chhandogya Upanishad that Gragee and other women of yore have read the Veda, and even Janshruti, a Sudra by birth, has studied the Veda under Raikyamuni" Satyarth Prakash, chapter 11.

Brahma Sutras and Manu Samriti discuss that Sudras can not study Veda. But the important issue is to know who **Sudra** is**.** Why he can not study the Vedas. As explained in the section on "Inter-movement in Varna Dharma" section, when Sudra can become a Brahman then he has all the right to study the Veda. The restriction placed on the study of Vedas is because of absence of the process (character, capability, and/or prerequisite) to study the Vedas.

The issue is not whether Varna Dharma is based on birth or not, nor whether Brahmans are higher Varna than any other. These may be **important** but not **sufficient**. **If Sudras are not Sudra by birth then**

Brahmans are not Brahmans by birth alone too. This must be an important aspect in the equation in any meaningful discussion about Varna Dharma.

There was no pecking order (higher or lower) in the society according to scriptures. Individuals were identified by their knowledge. The reverence given to a person in society (based on his knowledge) was a responsibility and not a privilege. All men are not equally wise or equally intelligent. Each one is trying to grapple with problems of life with whatever degree of wisdom each possesses. Hinduism provides for the highly evolved as well as those not so evolved or least evolved and even those not at all evolved in distinct categories of Brahimn, Kshatriya , Vaisya and Sudra with distinct Svadharma (assigned duties) suited to their individual state of evolution.

Realisation is not dependent on birth or book-learning as has been repeatedly demonstrated in the lives of saints, from the very earliest times to our own day (Comments by Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama).

"Who are Rishis? Vatsyayana says, He who has attained through proper means the direct realization of Dharma, he alone can be a Rishi even if he is a Mlechcha by birth" (The Complete works of Swami Vivekanand, volume 3, page 456*)*.

Many great Rishis were born in lower castes (eg.) VASISHTA was the son of a prostitute; VYASA was born of a fisher woman; PARASARA's mother was a chandala; NAMMALWAR was a Sudra. Similarly Valmiki, Viswamitra, Agastya were Brahmins inspite of their non-brahmin origin. Swami Vivekananda Vivekananda is one of the most revered Hindu worldwide and was a non Brahmin. All these Hindus prove that birth was not a major player in attaining Brahminhood. It is the intellectual and spiritual level that differentiates people.

Swami Sivananda (The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh) , in his commentary on Gita,Ch.18, verses 41,and 45 says: "Mankind is organised into the four castes and each man`s life is divided into four stages, according to the nature of the Gunas and the degree of growth or evolution. This is the division of labour for which each caste is fitted according to its own nature. The duty prescribed is your sole support, each devoted to his own duty in accordance with his own nature or caste, and the highest service you can render to the Supreme is to carry it out whole-heartedly, without expectation of fruits, with the attitude of dedication to the Lord. The caste system is, indeed, a splendid thing. It is quite flawless. But the defect came in from somewhere else. The classes gradually neglected their duties. The test of ability and character slowly vanished. Birth became the chief consideration in determining castes. All castes fell from their ideals and forgot all about their duties."

Scriptures treated all the Varnas as same and none was higher than the other. And nobody belongs to any Varna by birth. Vajra Suchikopanishad clearly states that one cannot be a Brahmin either by its being, birth, physical equipment of body and color or by wisdom and knowledge or by religious action even

The basis of Varna was guna and not birth. Vajra suchikopanishad of Sama Veda defines the word Brahmin in most unambiguous terms thus: One is a Brahmin not because of his birth or caste or heredity or color or profession or acquisition of worldly knowledge or mere observation of social and moral codes, but because of his spiritual knowledge, his abidance in the Supreme Reality, his state of self-realization. This is the conclusion of all Veda, Srutis, Puranas, Itihasas and of all great men of India.

According to 'Guru Bala Prabodhika' a commentary on Amara Kosa, the ancient Sanskrit lexicon, a Brahmin is one who knows Brahman (Supreme God), not one who is borne into a caste. (Brahmin Parabrahmani nishtatwat Brahmanah).

One of the main reasons for confusion about Varnas is that there is a vast amount of scriptures in the Hindu Dharma. People do not always know the order of the scriptures. Even when the order is known, the scriptures are not easily interpreted since all scriptures are written in Sanskrit. Even the people who can interpret the scriptures not necessarily understand them. The confusion is not what is written originally in Sanskrit but in the misunderstanding of the Sanskrit translations. The first issue in understanding of Varna Dharma is to understand the order of the scriptures. The Vedas are the ultimate authority in Hindu Dharma. The second issue is to understand that Varna Ashram is evolutionary in nature.

A key issue in understanding of Varna lies in knowledge of Sanskrit. There was and is no misunderstanding about Varnas as written in Sanskrit. The Varna Ashram started falling apart when the original Sanskrit work is translated in to English, especially by the people who donot have command over both languages (Sanskrit and English) and with limited knowledge about the scriptures. There are many words and terms in Sanskrit which have no equivalent in English language – Dharma and Varna are two examples. The closest meaning in English is a force fit and not necessarily the right choice. The right approach in understanding Vedic concepts starts with learning of Sanskrit.

As Swami Sivananda said "Varnasrama pertains to body alone, but not to the pure, all-pervading, immortal soul or Atman. ttain Knowledge of the Self and become an Ativarnasrami like Lord Dattatreya. Hear what he says:-

Mahadadi jagat sarvam
Na kinchit pratibhati me
Brahmaiva kevalam sarvam
Katham varnasramasthitih

"The whole world, from Mahat downwards, does not shine in Me. Everything is Brahman only. Where then is Varnasrama?"

Appendices

Adi Sankracrya

maniishhaapaJNchakaM

मनीषापञ्चकं

Maniishhaa panchakam was written by Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya. A biography of Shankara and his other compositions of vedic literature can be found in the shankara.itx document.

Shri Shankara has been criticized by modern western scholars for propounding sectarian beliefs in his commentary (bhashya) of Brahma sutra where he restricts the recitation of Vedas to the upper castes only. However, one should note that one is handicapped when writing a commentary on a text. Thus in independent compositions like the upadesasahasri and this short text, maniishhaa panchakam he expounds his Advaita philosophy in all its glory. Advaita, the non-dualistic philosophy expounded in detail by Shri Shankara, does not recognize differences between people based on caste, creed, religion, gender etc since we are all the manifestations of the same Brahman.

The scene is set in Varanasi (Kashi/Benaras), the ancient sacred city of India, and the home to the famous kashi visvanatha temple. Adi shankaraachaarya, the expounder of the advaitic, non-dualistic philosophy, was on the way to the temple after finishing his bath. Suddenly he saw a chandaala (an outcaste), on the way, and beckons to him to keep a distance, as per the practice and custom in those days. That outcaste is none other than the Lord sha.nkara (Shiva) Himself! At such beckoning, the Lord addresses his devotee sha.nkarAchArya, in the first two stanzas (the prologue), as under:

अन्नमयादन्नमयमथवा चैतन्यमेव चैतन्यात्।
यतिवर दूरीकर्तुं वाञ्छसि किं ब्रूहि गच्छ गच्छेति ॥

O great ascetic! Tell me. Do you want me to keep a distance from you, by uttering 'go away' 'go away' taking me to be an outcaste ? Is it addressed from one body made of food to another body made of food, or is it consciousness from consciousness --- which, O, the best among ascetics, you wish should go away, by saying `` Go away, go away"? Do tell me.

प्रत्यग्वस्तुनि निस्तरङ्गसहजानन्दावबोधाम्बुधौ
विप्रोऽयं श्वपचोऽयमित्यपि महान्कोऽयं विभेधभ्रमः।
किं गङ्गाम्बुनि बिम्बितेऽम्बरमणौ चाण्डालवीथीपयः
पूरे वाऽन्तरमस्ति काञ्चनघटीमृत्कुम्भयोर्वाऽम्बरे ॥

Answer me. While the supreme Being is reflected in every object as the sun's reflecion could be seen in the placid waveless water bodies why this doubting confusion and differentiation i.e. whether one is a brahmin or an outcaste ? who is the superior one etc ?. Is there any difference in the reflection of the sun in the waters of the Ganges or in the water present in the street of an outcaste? Likewise, is there any difference when the water- containers happen to be golden vessels and earthen pots

?

(Immediately shankaraacharya realises the presence of the Lord Shankara before him (who has apparently shown Himself with a view to removing the last vestige of imperfection in His devotee) and reels off the following 5 stanzas-constituting 'maniishhaapa.nchakam.h'-ending with a further stanza in the form of an epilogue).

जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्तिषु स्फुटतरा या संविदुज्जृम्भते
या ब्रह्मादिपिपीलिकान्ततनुषु प्रोता जगत्साक्षिणी ।
सैवाहं न च दृश्यवस्त्विति दृढप्रज्ञापि यस्यास्ति चे-
च्चाण्डालोऽस्तु स तु द्विजोऽस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा
मम ॥ १ ॥

If one is convinced firmly, that he is that very Soul which manifests itself in all the conditions of sleep, wakefulness and dream, in all the objects from the great Brahma (the creator) to the tiny ant and which is also the vibrant, but invisible, witnesser of all, then as per my clear conclusion, he is the great teacher/preceptor, be he a twice-born (i.e higher castes) or an outcaste.

ब्रह्मैवाहमिदं जगच्च सकलं चिन्मात्रविस्तारितं
सर्वं चैतदविद्यया त्रिगुणयाऽशेषं मया कल्पितम् ।
इत्थं यस्य दृढा मतिः सुखतरे नित्ये परे निर्मले
चाण्डालोऽस्तु स तु द्विजोऽस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा
मम ॥ २ ॥

I am quite convinced that he is the great Master, be he a Brahmin or an outcaste, who, dwelling on the pure and infinite Brahman thinks of himself as that very Brahman, of whose anifestation the whole Universe is,though apparently the Universe is assumed to consist of different things, due to ignorance and the three Gunas (Satva, Rajas and Tamas).

शश्वन्नश्वरमेव विश्वमखिलं निश्चित्य वाचा गुरो-
र्नित्यं ब्रह्म निरन्तरं विमृशता निर्व्याजशान्तात्मना ।
भूतं भाति च दुष्कृतं प्रदहता संविन्मये पावके
प्रारब्धाय समर्पितं स्ववपुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥ ३ ॥

I am fully convinced by the Preceptor's words that the entire Universe is a transitory illusion and that the human body is given to constantly meditate on the infinite and supreme Being with a serene and unquestioning mind and thus to burn in that sacred Fire the sins with which the human is born.

या तिर्यङ्नरदेवताभिरहमित्यन्तः स्फुटा गृह्यते
यद्भासा हृदयाक्षदेहविषया भान्ति स्वतोऽचेतनाः ।
तां भास्यैः पिहितार्कमण्डलनिभां स्फूर्तिं सदा भावय-
न्योगी निर्वृतमानसो हि गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥ ४ ॥

In my considered opinion that Yogi is great who has clearly grasped within himself the truth and quality of the supreme Being through which all our activities are performed and whose effulgence is hidden by ignorance [of an ordinary person] even as the sun's halo is covered/hidden by the clouds.

यत्सौख्याम्बुधिलेशलेशत इमे शक्रादयो निर्वृता
यच्चित्ते नितरां प्रशान्तकलने लब्ध्वा मुनिर्निर्वृतः ।
यस्मिन्नित्यसुखाम्बुधौ गलितधीर्ब्रह्मैव न ब्रह्मविद्
यः कश्चित्स सुरेन्द्रवन्दितपदो नूनं मनीषा मम ॥ ५ ॥

I am convinced that whoever has his mind dwelling upon the Great Being who is being worshipped by Indra and other gods and is thus completely at peace with himself has not only understood Brahman but he is himself that great Brahman!

दासस्तेऽहं देहदृष्ट्याऽस्मि शंभो
जातस्तेंऽशो जीवदृष्ट्या त्रिदृष्टे ।
सर्वस्याऽऽत्मन्नात्मदृष्ट्या त्वमेवे-
त्येवं मे धीर्निश्चिता सर्वशास्त्रैः ॥

Oh Lord ! In the form of body I am your servant. In the form of life, O three-eyed one, I am part of yourself. In the form of soul, you are within me and in every other soul.I have arrived at this conclusion through my intellect and on the authority of the various scriptures.

॥ इति श्रीमच्छङ्करभगवतः कृतौ मनीषापञ्चकं संपूर्णम् ॥

Thus ends the 'maniishhApaJNchakam.h' composed by the Adishankaraacharya.

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मनीषापञ्चकं Please forward corrections to swami@math.mun.ca

Swami Vivekananda

Caste Problem In India

This article is a chapter from the book, "Swami Vivekananda On India and Her Problems". This book (Code: AVE061) can be purchased from Advaita Ashrama.

"I have a message for the world, which I will deliver without fear and care for the future. To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform." - Swami Vivekananda

Caste In Society And Not In Religion

Though our castes and our institutions are apparently linked with our religion, they are not so. These institutions have been necessary to protect us as a nation, and when this necessity for self-preservation will no more exist, they will die a natural death. In religion there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India and the two castes become equal. The caste system is opposed to the religion of Vedanta.

Caste is a social custom, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Beginning from Buddha to Rammohan Ray, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste altogether, and failed.

In spite of all the ravings of the priests, caste is simply a crystallized social institution, which after doing its service is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench, and it can only be removed by giving back to people their lost social individuality. Caste is simply the outgrowth of the political institutions of India; it is a hereditary trade guild. Trade competition with Europe has broken caste more than any teaching.

The Underlying Idea Of The Caste System

The older I grow, the better I seem to think of caste and such other time-honored institutions of India. There was a time when I used to think that many of them were useless and worthless, but the older I grow, the more I seem to feel a difference in cursing any one of them, for each one of them is the embodiment of the experience of centuries.

A child of but yesterday, destined to die the day after tomorrow, comes to me and asks me to change all my plans and if I hear the advice of that baby and change all my surroundings according to his ideas I myself should be a fool, and no one else. Much of the advice that is coming to us from different countries is similar to this. Tell these wiseacres, "I will hear you when you have made a stable society yourselves. You cannot hold on to one idea for two days, you quarrel and fail; you are born like moths in the spring and die like them in five minutes. You come up like bubbles and burst like bubbles too. First form a stable society like ours. First make laws and institutions that remains undiminished in their power through scores of centuries. Then will be the time to talk on the subject with you, but till then, my friend, you are only a giddy child."

Caste is a very good thing. Caste is the plan we want to follow. What caste really is, not one in a million understands. There is no country in the world without caste. Caste is based throughout on that principle. The plan in India is to make everybody Brahmana, the Brahmana being the ideal of humanity. If you read the history of India you will find that attempts have always been made to raise the lower classes. Many are the classes that have been raised. Many more will follow till the whole will become Brahmana. That is the plan.

Our ideal is the Brahmana of spiritual culture and renunciation. By the Brahmana ideal what do I mean? I mean the ideal Brahmana-ness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race. Have you not heard how it is declared he, the Brahmana, is not amenable to law, that he has no law, that he is not governed by kings, and that his body cannot be hurt? That is perfectly true. Do not understand it in the light thrown upon it by interested and ignorant fools, but understand it in the light of the true and original Vedantic conception.. If the Brahmana is he who has killed all selfishness and who lives to acquire and propagate wisdom and the power of love - if a country is altogether inhabited by such Brahmanas, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think of that country as being above and beyond all law? What police, what Military are necessary to govern them? Why should any one govern them at all? Why should they live under a government? They are good and noble, and they are the men of God; these are our ideal Brahmanas, and we read that in the SatyaYuga there was only one caste, and that was the Brahmana. We read in the Mahabharata that the whole world was in the beginning peopled with Brahmanas, and that as they began to degenerate they became divided into different castes, and that when the cycle turns round they will all go back to that Brahmanical origin.

The son of a Brahmana is not necessarily always a Brahmana; though there is every possibility of his being one, he may not become so. The Brahmana caste and the Brahmana quality are two distinct things.

As there are sattva, rajas and tamas - one or other of these gunas more or less - in every man, so the qualities which make a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya or a Shudra are inherent in every man, more or less. But at time one or other of these qualities predominates in him in varying degrees and is manifested accordingly. Take a man in his different pursuits, for example : when he is engaged in serving another for pay, he is in Shudra-hood; when he is busy transacting some some piece of business for profit, on his account, he is a Vaishya; when he fights to right wrongs then the qualities of a Kshatriya come out in him; and when he meditates on God, or passes his time in conversation about Him, then he is a Brahmana. Naturally, it is quite possible for one to be changed from one caste into another. Otherwise, how did Viswamitra become a Brahmana and Parashurama a Kshatriya?

The means of European civilization is the sword; of the Aryans, the division into different varnas. This system of division into varnas is the stepping-stone to civilization, making one rise higher and higher in proportion to one's learning and culture. In Europe, it is everywhere victory to the strong and death to the weak. In the land of Bharata (India), every social rule is for the protection of the weak.

Such is our ideal of caste, as meant for raising all humanity slowly and gently towards the realization of the great ideal of spiritual man, who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure and meditative. In that ideal there is God.

We believe in Indian caste as one of the greatest social institutions that the Lord gave to man. We also believe that through the unavoidable defects, foreign persecutions, and above all, the monumental ignorance and pride of many Brahmanas who do not deserve the name, have thwarted in many ways, the legitimate fructification of this glorious Indian institution, it has already worked wonders for the land of Bharata and it destined to lead Indian humanity to its goal.

Caste should not go; but should be readjusted occasionally. Within the old structure is to be life enough for the building of two hundred thousand new ones. It is sheer nonsense to desire the abolition of caste.

Inequalities of Privileges Vitiates The System

It is in the nature of society to form itself into groups; and what will go will be these privileges! Caste is a natural order. I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading Vedas, that is no reason why you should trample on my head; why if one commits murder should he be praised and if another steals an apple why should he be hanged? This will have to go.

Caste is good. That is only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups, and you cannot get rid of that. Wherever you go there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be these privileges. They should be knocked on the head. If you teach Vedanta to the fisherman, he will say, "I am as good a man as you, I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me, as you have in you." And that is what we want, no privilege for anyone, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the Divine is within, and everyone will work out his own salvation. The days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are gone, gone for ever from the soil of India.

Untouchability - A Superstitious Accretion

Formerly the characteristic of the noble-minded was - (tribhuvanamupakara shrenibhih priyamanah) "to please the whole universe by one's numerous acts of service", but now it is - I am pure and the whole world is impure. "Don't touch me!" "Don't touch me!" The whole world is impure, and I alone am pure! Lucid Brahmajnana! Bravo! Great God! Nowadays, Brahman is neither in the recesses of the heart, nor in the highest heaven, nor in all beings - now He is in the cooking pot!

We are orthodox Hindus, but we refuse entirely to identify ourselves with "Don't- touchism". That is not Hinduism; it is in none of our books; it is an orthodox superstition, which has interfered with national efficiency all along the line. Religion has entered in the cooking pot. The present religion of the Hindus is neither the path of Knowledge or Reason - it is "Don't-touchism". - "Don't touch me", "Don't touch me" - that exhausts its description.

"Don't touchism" is a form of mental disease. Beware! All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. See that you do not lose your lives in this dire irreligion of "Don't- touchism". Must the teaching (Atmavat sarvabhuteshu) - "Looking upon all beings as your own self" - be confined to books alone? How will they grant salvation who cannot feed a hungry mouth with a crumb of bread? How will those, who become impure at the mere breath of others, purify others?

We must cease to tyrannize. To what a ludicrous state are we brought! If a bhangi comes to anybody as a bhangi, he would be shunned as the plague; but no sooner does he get a cupful of water poured upon his head with some muttering of prayers by a padri, and get a coat to his back, no matter how threadbare, and come into the room of the most orthodox Hindu, I don't see the man who then dare refuse him a chair and a hearty shake of hands! Irony can go no farther.

Just see, for want of sympathy from the Hindus, thousands of pariahs in Madras are turning Christians. Don't think that this is simply due to the pinch of hunger; it is because they do not get any sympathy from us. We are day and night calling out to them "Don't touch us! Don't touch us!" Is there any compassion or kindliness of heart in the country? Only a class of "Don't-touchists" ; kick such customs out! I sometimes feel the urge to break the barriers of "Don't-touchism", go at once and call out, "Come all who are poor, miserable, wretched and downtrodden", and to bring them all together. Unless they rise, the Mother will not awake.

Each Hindu, I say, is a brother to every other, and it is we, who have degraded them by our outcry, "Don't touch", "Don't touch!" And so the whole country has been plunged to the utmost depths of meanness, cowardice and ignorance. These men have to be lifted; words of hope and faith have to be proclaimed to them. We have to tell them, "You are also men like us and you have all the rights that we have."

Solution of The Caste Problem

Our solution of the caste question is not degrading those who are already high up, is not running amuck through food and drink, is not jumping out of our own limits in order to have more enjoyment, but it comes by every one of us fulfilling the dictates of our Vedantic religion, by our attaining spirituality and by our becoming ideal Brahmana. There is a law laid on each one of you in this land by your ancestors, whether you are Aryans, or non-Aryans, rishis or Brahmanas or the very lowest outcaste. The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to the lowest pariah, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmana. This Vedantic idea is applicable not only here but over the whole world.

The Brahmana-hood is the ideal of humanity in India as wonderfully put forward by Shankaracharya at the beginning of his commentary on the Gita, where he speaks about the reason for Krishna's coming as a preacher for the preservation of Brahmana- hood, of Brahmana-ness. That was the great end. This Brahmana, the man of God, he who has known Brahman, the ideal man, the perfect man, must remain, he must not go. And with all the defects of the caste now, we know that we must all be ready to give to the Brahmanas this credit, that from them have come more men with real Brahmana-ness in them than from all the other castes. We must

be bold enough, must be brave enough to speak their defects, but at the same time we must give credit that is due to them.

Therefore, it is no use fighting among the castes. What good will it do? It will divide us all the more, weaken us all the more, degrade us all the more. The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher. And that is the line of work that is found in all our books, in spite of what you may hear from some people whose knowledge of their own Scriptures and whose capacity to understand the mighty plans of the ancients are only zero. What is the plan? The ideal at the one end is the Brahmana and the ideal at the other end is the chandala, and the whole work is to raise the chandala up to the Brahmana. Slowly and slowly you will find more and more privileges granted to them.

I regret that in modern times there should be so much discussion between the castes. This must stop. It is useless on both sides, especially on the side of the higher caste, the Brahmana, the day for these privileges and exclusive claims is gone. The duty of every aristocracy is to dig its own grave, and the sooner it does so, the better. The more he delays, the more it will fester and the worse death it will die. It is the duty of the Brahmana, therefore, to work for the salvation of the rest of mankind, in India. If he does that and so long as he does that, he is a Brahmana.

Any one who claims to be a Brahmana, then, should prove his pretensions, first by manifesting that spirituality, and next by raising others to the same status. We earnestly entreat the Brahmanas not to forget the ideal of India - the production of a universe of Brahmanas, pure as purity, good as God Himself : this was at the beginning, says the Mahabharata and so will it be in the end.

It seems that most of the Brahmanas are only nursing a false pride of birth; and any schemer, native or foreign, who can pander to this vanity and inherent laziness, by fulsome sophistry, appears to satisfy more.

Beware Brahmanas, this is the sign of death! Arise and show your manhood, your Brahmana-hood, by raising the non-Brahmanas around you - not in the spirit of a master - not with the rotten canker of egoism crawling with superstitions and charlatanry of East and West - but in the spirit of a servant.

To the Brahmanas I appeal, that they must work hard to raise the Indian people by teaching them what they know, by giving out the culture that they have accumulated for centuries. It is clearly the duty of the Brahmanas of India to remember what real Brahmana-hood is. As Manu says, all these privileges and honors are given to the Brahmana because, "with him is the treasury of virtue". He must open that treasury and distribute to the world.

It is true that he was the earliest preacher to the Indian races, he was the first to renounce everything in order to attain to the higher realization of life, before others could reach to the idea. It was not his fault that he marched ahead of the other castes. Why did not the other castes so understand and do as they did? Why did they sit down and be lazy, and let the Brahmanas win the race?

But it is one thing to gain an advantage, and another thing to preserve it for evil use. Whenever power is used for evil it becomes diabolical; it must be used for good only. So this accumulated culture of ages of which the Brahmana has been the trustee, he must now give to the people, and it was because he did not open this treasury to the people, that the Muslims invasion was possible. It was because he did not open this treasury to the people from the beginning, that for a thousand years we have been trodden under the heels of everyone who chose to come to India; it was through that we have become degraded, and the first task must be to break open the cells that hide the wonderful treasures which our common ancestors accumulated; bring them out, and give them to everybody, and the Brahmana must be the first to do it. There is an old superstition in Bengal that if the cobra that bites, sucks out his own poison from the patient, the man must survive. Well then, the Brahmana must suck out his own poison.

To the non-Brahmana castes I say, wait, be not in a hurry. Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmana, because as I have shown; you are suffering from your own fault. Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? What have you been doing all this time? Why have you been indifferent? Why do you now fret and fume because somebody else had more brains, more energy, more pluck and go than you? Instead of wasting your energies in vain discussions and quarrels in the newspapers, instead of fighting and quarreling in your own homes - which is sinful - use all your energies in acquiring the culture which the Brahmana has, and the thing is done. Why do you not become Sanskrit scholars? Why do you not spend millions to bring Sanskrit education to all the castes of India? That is the question. The moment you do these things, you are equal to the Brahmana! That is the secret power in India.

The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition is to study Sanskrit, and this fighting and writing and frothing against the higher castes is in vain, it does no good, and it creates fight and quarrel, and this race, unfortunately already divided, is going to be divided more and more. The only way to bring about the leveling of castes is to appropriate the culture, the education which is the strength of the higher castes.

M. K. Gandhi

THE CURSE OF UNTOUCHABILITY (Section lV, Chapter 20, The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi - by R_ K_ Prabhu, U_ R_ Rao)

I DO NOT want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that, if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, but as an Atishudra. (YI, 4-5-1921, p144)

I was wedded to the work for the extinction of 'untouchability' long before I was wedded to my wife. There were two occasions in our joint life when there was choice between working for the untouchables and remaining with my wife and I would have preferred the first. But thanks to my good wife, the crisis was averted. In my Ashram, which is my family, I have several untouchables and a sweet but naughty girl living as my own daughter. (YI, 5-11-1931, p341)

Love of the people brought the problem of untouchability early into my life. My mother said. 'You must not touch this boy, he is an untouchable.' 'Why not?' I questioned back, and from that day my revolt began. (H, 24-12-1938, p393)

Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among his creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others. (YI, 25-5-1921, p165)

It is simple fanatical obstinacy to persist in persecuting man in the sacred name of religion. (YI, 11-3-1926, p95)

For reforms of Hinduism and for its real protection, removal of untouchability is the greatest thing...Removal of untouchability is....a spiritual process. (YI, 6-1-1927, p2)

If untouchability lives, Hinduism must die. (H, 28-9-1947, p349)

I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived.190 In battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, 'Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it. (YI, 26-11-1931, p372)

Untouchability and Caste

It is a wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it or of a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we

understand it, has therefore to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-low'-ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnadharma, the four division of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other. (H, 11-2-1933, p3)

Varnashrama Dharma

Varnashrama Dharma defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood; on the contrary, man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. It restricts him, therefore, for the purpose of holding body and soul together, to the occupation of his forefathers. That and nothing more or nothing less is Varnashrama Dharma. (YI, 27-10-1927, p357)

I do, however, believe in varna which is based on hereditary occupations. Varnas are four to mark four universal occupations,--imparting knowledge, defending the defenseless, carrying on agriculture and commerce, and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all, whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the law of varna. When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of varna resulted in innumerable castes, with unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to inter-marriage and inter-dine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interest of chastity and hygiene. But a Brahmana who marries a Shudra girl, or vice versa, commits no offence against the law of varnas. (YI, 4-6-1931, p129)

Today Brahmins and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are mere labels. There is utter confusion of varna as I understand it and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves Shudras. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of Brahminism and to revive Varnadharma in its true state. (H, 25-3-1933, p3)

I believe that every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definit limitations which he cannot overcome. From a careful observation of those limitations the law of varna was deduced. It established certain spheres of actions for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whilst recognizing limitations, the law of varna admitted of no distinctions of high and low; on the one hand, it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labours, and one the other, it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbours. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to. (MR, Oct. 1935, p413)

Inter-marriage and Inter-dining

Though there is in Varnashrama no prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. (H, 16-11-1935, p316)

Caste……I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. (YI, 8-12-1920, p3)

From the economic point of view, its value was once very great. It ensured hereditary skill; it limited competition. It was the best remedy against pauperism. And it had all the advantages of trade guilds. Although it did not foster adventure or invention there, it is not known to have come in the way either... Historically speaking, caste may regarded as man's experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against heartless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed. (YI, 5-1-1921, p2)

Caste and Varna

...I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence, it is a mental state. We need to thing of, and to assert, equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it 0connots distinctions in status, is an evil. (YI, 4-6-1931, p129)

Caste distinctions have taken such deep root amongst us that they have also infected the Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions in India. It is true that class barriers are also to be found in more or less degree in other parts of the world. This means that it is a distemper common to the human race. It can be eliminated only by the inculcation of religion in its true sense. I have not found sanction for such barriers and distinctions in the scriptures of any religion. In the eye of religion all men are equal. Learning, intellect or riches do not entitle one to claim superiority over those who are lacking in these. If any person is suffused and sanctified with the purifying essence and discipline of true religion, he regards himself under the obligation to share his advantages with those who have fewer. That being so, in our present fallen state, true religion requires us all to become Atishudras by choice.

We must regard ourselves not as owners, but as trustees of our wealth, and use it for the service of society, taking for ourselves no more than a fair return for service rendered. Under this system there would be none poor, none rich. All religions would be held equal. All quarrels arising out of religion, caste or economic grievance would cease to disturb peace on earth. (Hu, 19-9-1945).

Sources

H Harijan :(1933-1956) English weekly journal founded by Gandhiji and published under the auspices of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Poona, and from 1942, by the Navajivan Trust, Ahmadabad. T he weekly suspended publication in 1940 during the "Individual Satyagraha"; resumed in january 1942, but stopped appearing during the Quit India Struggle. It reappeared in 1946.

Hu The Hindu: Daily newspaper published from Calcutta.

MR The Modern Review: monthly journal published from Calcutta.

YI Young India:(1919-1932) English weekly journal, published from Bombay as a bi-weekly, under Gandhiji's supervision from May 7, 1919, and as a weekly from Ahmedabad, with Gandhiji as editor from October 8, 1919.

Dr. Radha Krishnan

"Caturvarnyam: the fourfold order. The emphasis is on guna (aptitude) and karma (function) and not jati (birth). The varna or the order to which we belong is independent of sex, birth or breeding. A class determined by temperament and vocation is not a caste determined by birth and heredity. According to the Mahabharat, the whole world was originally of one class but later it became divided into four divisions on account of the specific duties.

Ekavarnam idam purvam visvam asid yudhisthira
Karmakriyavisesena caturvarnyam pratisthitam

Even the distinction between caste and outcaste is artificial and unspiritual. An ancient verse points out that the Brahmin and the outcastes are blood brothers.

Antyajo viprajatis ca eka evasahodarah
Ekayoniprasutas ca ekasakhena jayate

In the Mahabharat, Yudhisthira says that it is difficult to find out caste of persons on account of the mixture of castes. Men beget offspring in all sorts of women. So conduct is the only determining feature of caste according to sages.

Samkardt sarvavarnanam dusparikyesti me matih
Sarve sarvasvapatyani janayanti sada narah
Tasmati silam pradhanestam vidur ye tattvadarsinah

The fourfold order is designed for human evolution. There is nothing absolute about the caste system which has changed its character in the process of history. Today it can not be regarded as anything more than an insistence on a variety of ways in which the social purpose can be carried out. Functional grouping will never be out of date and as for marriages they will happen among those who belong to more or less the same stage of cultural development. The present morbid condition of India broken into castes and subcastes is opposed to the unity taught by the Gita, which stands for an organic as against atomistic conception of society". (by Dr. Radha Krishnan)

Swami ChinmayaNand

The Varna system was solely based on the attitude of an individual and his/her propensity for performing certain duties. Swami Chinmayanand explained the three Gunas and their meanings in chapter 18 of the Gita. The following discussion about Origin of Varna is from chapter 4, 12 of the Gita by Swami Chinmayanandji.

"This is a stanza that has been much misused in recent times by the upholders of the social crime styled as the caste system in India. Varna, meaning different shades of texture, or colour, is employed here in the Yogik-sense. In the Yogasastra, they attribute some definite colours to the triple guna-s, which mean, as we have said earlier, "the mental temperaments." Thus, Sattva is considered as white, Rajas as red, and Tamas as black. Man is essentially the thoughts that he entertains. From individual to individual, even when the thoughts are superficially the same, there are clear distinctions recognizable from their temperaments.

On the basis of these temperamental distinctions, the entire mankind has been, for the purpose of spiritiual study, classified into four 'castes' of Varna-s. …………For the perfectly healthy life of a society, all 'castes' should not be competitive but co-operative units, each being complementary to the others, never competing among themselves.

However, later on, in the power politics of the early middleages in India, this communal feeling cropped up in its present ugliness, and in the general ignorance among the ordinary people at the time, the cheap pandit-s could parade their assumed knowledge by quoting , in bits, stanzas like this one.

The decadent Hindu-brahmana found it very convenient to quote the first quarter of the stanza, and repeat "I created the four Varna-s," and give this tragic social vivisection a divine look having a godly sanction. They, who did this, were in fact, the greatest blasphemers that Hinduism ever had to reckon with. For Vyasa, in the same line of the couplet, as though in the same breath, describes the basis on which this classification was made, when he says, "By the differentiation of the mental quality and physical action (of the people)."

Guna → Varna ↓	Sattvik (The Good)	Rajasik (The Passionate)	Tamasik (The Dull)
Brahmana	80%	15%	5%
Ksatriya	15%	80%	5%
Vaisya	5%	80%	15%
Sudra	5%	5%	90%
Knowledge (p 40)	The "Knowledge" which can recognize and live constantly the Truth is Sattvik. To recognize the flux of things to feel the harmony underlying the unity in diversity of forms and behaviours, to live the awareness of the One Life that pulsates in every bosom, is the genuine achievement of a Sattvik intellect.	The "Knowledge" which looks upon other living entities as different from one another is passionate: An intellect to which the world is an assortment of various types, behaving under various moods differently, an intellect that recognizes the world as made up of an endless incomprehensible plurality, as possessed of "knowledge" that is Rajasik.	The "Knowledge" which fanatically regards without rhyme or reason, particular path or view the sole end without understanding the path or view correctly and sticks on to it with extreme self-arrogance and egoistic insistence, the 'knowledge' which considers the entire world of things and beings as meant for its owner and his pleasures alone, the 'Knowledge' which fails to recognize anything really existing beyond the little ego, is Tamasik.
Karma (p 46)	Sattvik actions are those that are one's own obligatory duties towards the society, performed without any clinging attachment to the fruits thereof and that are not motivated by likes and dislikes. He performs these duties just spontaneously. He seeks his fulfillment and joy in the very work itself. Such Sattvik actions are undertaken by men who possess the Sattvik 'Knowledge".	Rajasik actions are those that are propelled by some desires to be fulfilled, that are performed in a self-centred delusory attitude of 'I-am-the-doer' vanity, and that are undertaken with great strain and labour on the part of the actor or doer. Such 'actions' are undertaken by the Passionate who possess Rajasik 'knowledge'.	Tamasik actions are those that are undertaken without any regard to the consequences thereof, that bring un disaster and sorrow to all around and about the doer, and that sap dry the abilities and vitalities in the doer Himself. Such actions spring from some delusory misconceptions of the goal of life in the individual. Such 'actions' of the dull are generally met with only in persons who possess Tamasik 'knowledge'.
Karta (Actors) (p 52)	An actor (doer) who has no attachment to the field in which he is acting – who is not egoistic – who is full of fortitude and zeal – who is unmoved by the results of his actions, be they success or failure – such a doer is considered a Sattvik karta.	An actor (doer) who is swayed by passions – who ever anxiously ogles at the expected fruit of each action – who is extremely greedy – who acts, bringing often harm to others – who is impure and sometimes immoral in his means – who is ever buffeted by the joys and sorrows of life – such a doer is considered as a Rajasik Karta.	An actor (doer) who has no control over his own mental impulses and instincts – who will readily stoop to any vulgarity – who is arrogant and obstinate in his own wrong conclusion – who is deceitful and malicious – who is indolent – who ever lives worried about 'what is to be done' by him – such a 'doer' is considered as a Tamasik Karta.

Budhi (Understanding) (p60)	The 'understanding' that can readily judge things that are to be done (pravriti) and things that are to be renounced or avoided (nivrtti) – that correctly discerns what ought to be done (karyam) and what ought not to be done (a-karyam) – that can understand fear and fearlessness – is considered as the Sattvik: budhi an 'understanding' of Purity.	The 'understanding' that erroneously conceives both the right and the wrong, that falsely judges what should be done and what should not be done (due to its false egoistic preconception) – is considered as the Rajasik Budhi: an 'understanding' of Energy.	The 'understanding' that deems the wrong as the right, reversing every value-involved in darkness (ignorance) and, therefore, sees all things in a perverted way, ever contrary to the truth – is considered as the Tamasik Budhi: an 'understanding' of Darkness.
Dhriti (Fortitude) (66)	The 'fortitude' by which one, through Yoga (concentration), controls steadily the activities of the mind, sense-organs of action (pranendriya-s) and the organs of perception (indriya-s) is the 'pure' type of 'fortitude'.	The 'fortitude' by which one holds firmly with attachment to duty (dharma), pleasure (karma), and wealth (artha) – ever desirous of coming to enjoy the future rewards of joy promised by them (fruits of action) – is of the 'passionate' type of 'fortitude'.	The 'fortitude' by which a foolish man does not abandon sleep (non-apprehension of reality), fear)fancied fear of something to happen), grief (for something already happened), depression and arrogance while living the present – is the 'dull' type of 'fortitude'.
Happiness (p72)	The Sattvik 'happiness' is the arising out of the inner self-control and consequent self-perfection which, though it looks painful and arduous in the beginning, is enduring in the long run, in contrast with the fleeting joys provided by sense-ticklings. The result-of inner discipline and contemplation brings about tranquility (Prasad) in the intellect, and from this tranquility of the intellect gurgles out the 'happiness' which is called 'Sattvik' happiness.	The Rajasik 'happiness' arises only when the sense-organs are directly in contact with the sense-object. In the beginning it is quite nectarine and alluring, but it creates in the enjoyer a sense of exhaustion and dissipastion in the long run. Even when one experiences the Rajasik type of 'happiness' brought about by the sense-organs, it is tainted by an anxiety of diminution and loss of it. Therefore, the temporary 'happiness' provided by the sense-objects is termed as the 'Rajasik happiness'.	The Tamasik 'happiness' is the joy which takes us away from our real nature, creates cultural morbidity in our inner life, and given the intellect a thin crust of wrong values and false ideals. In the enjoyment of this Tamasik 'happiness,' the permanent, ever existing Goal of Life the receded to the background, and this result in seeking simple gratifications at the flesh level. This kind of pursuits incapacitates the intellect to think out correctly the problems (alasya) that face it and to arrive at a right judgment. When the intellect is weak, the mind seeks to compromise with the temptations, heedless of the voice of the higher in us (pramada). Such a 'happiness' which deludes the soul, both at the beginning and the end, is classified as Tamasik.

Prof. Koenraad Elst

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Caste Verdict from Belgium

Last month, two ardent Hindus battled out the controversial pros and cons of caste. This month's assessment, from Europe, focuses on history and how jati and varna have, for the most part, helped rather than hurt Hinduism.

By Prof. Koenraad Elst

In an inter-faith debate, most Hindus can easily be put on the defensive with a single word-caste. Any anti-Hindu polemist can be counted on to allege that "the typically Hindu caste system is the most cruel apartheid, imposed by the barbaric white Aryan invaders on the gentle dark-skinned natives." Here's a more balanced and historical account of this controversial institution.

Merits of the Caste System

The caste system is often portrayed as the ultimate horror. Inborn inequality is indeed unacceptable to us moderns, but this does not preclude that the system has also had its merits. Caste is perceived as an "exclusion-from," but first of all it is a form of "belonging-to," a natural structure of solidarity. For this reason, Christian and Muslim missionaries found it very difficult to lure Hindus away from their communities. Sometimes castes were collectively converted to Islam, and Pope Gregory XV (1621-23) decreed that the missionaries could tolerate caste distinction among Christian converts; but by and large, caste remained an effective hurdle to the destruction of Hinduism through conversion. That is why the missionaries started attacking the institution of caste and in particular the brahmin caste. This propaganda has bloomed into a full-fledged anti-brahminism, the Indian equivalent of anti-Semitism.

Every caste had a large measure of autonomy, with its own judiciary, duties and privileges, and often its own temples. Inter-caste affairs were settled at the village council by consensus; even the lowest caste had veto power. This autonomy of intermediate levels of society is the antithesis of the totalitarian society in which the individual stands helpless before the all-powerful state. This decentralized structure of civil society and of the Hindu religious commonwealth has been crucial to the survival of Hinduism under Muslim rule. Whereas Buddhism was swept away as soon as its monasteries were destroyed, Hinduism retreated into its caste structure and weathered the storm.

Caste also provided a framework for integrating immigrant communities: Jews, Zoroastrians and Syrian Christians. They were not only tolerated, but assisted in efforts to preserve their distinctive traditions.

Typically Hindu?

It is routinely claimed that caste is a uniquely Hindu institution. Yet, counter examples are not hard to come by. In Europe and elsewhere, there was (or still is) a hierarchical distinction between noblemen and commoners, with nobility only marrying nobility. Many tribal societies punished the breach of endogamy rules with death. Coming to the Indian tribes, we find Christian missionaries claiming that "tribals are not Hindus because they do not observe caste." In reality, missionary literature itself is rife with testimonies of caste practices among tribals. A spectacular example is what the missions call "the Mistake:" the attempt, in 1891, to make tribal converts in Chhotanagpur inter-dine with converts from other tribes. It was a disaster for the mission. Most tribals renounced Christianity because they chose to preserve the taboo on inter-dining. As strongly as the haughtiest brahmin, they refused to mix what God hath separated.

Endogamy and exogamy are observed by tribal societies the world over. The question is therefore not why Hindu society invented this system, but how it could preserve these tribal identities even after outgrowing the tribal stage of civilization. The answer lies largely in the expanding Vedic culture's intrinsically respectful and conservative spirit, which ensured that each tribe could preserve its customs and traditions, including its defining custom of tribal endogamy.

Description and History

The Portuguese colonizers applied the term caste, "lineage, breed," to two different Hindu institutions: jati and varna. The effective unit of the caste system is the jati, birth-unit, an endogamous group into which you are born, and within which you marry. In principle, you can only dine with fellow members, but the pressures of modern life have eroded this rule. The several thousands of jatis are subdivided in exogamous clans, gotra. This double division dates back to tribal society.

By contrast, varna is the typical functional division of an advanced society-the Indus/Saraswati civilization, 3rd millennium, bce. The youngest part of the Rg-Veda describes four classes: learned brahmins born from Brahma's mouth, martial kshatriya-born from his arms; vaishya entrepreneurs born from His hips and shudra workers born from His feet. Everyone is a shudra by birth. Boys become dwija, twice-born, or member of one of the three upper varnas upon receiving the sacred thread in the upanayana ceremony.

The varna system expanded from the Saraswati-Yamuna area and got firmly established in the whole of Aryavarta (Kashmir to Vidarbha, Sindh to Bihar). It counted as a sign of superior culture setting the arya, civilized, heartland apart from the surrounding mleccha, barbaric, lands. In Bengal and the South, the system was reduced to a distinction between brahmins and shudras. Varna is a ritual category and does not fully correspond to effective social or economic status. Thus, half of the princely rulers in British India were shudras and a few were brahmins, though it is the kshatriya function par excellence. Many shudras are rich, many brahmins impoverished.

The Mahabharata defines the varna qualities thus: "He in whom you find truthfulness, generosity, absence of hatred, modesty, goodness and self-restraint, is a brahmana. He who fulfills the duties of a knight, studies the scriptures, concentrates on acquisition and distribution of riches, is a kshatriya. He who loves cattle-breeding, agriculture and money, is honest and

well-versed in scripture, is a vaishya. He who eats anything, practises any profession, ignores purity rules, and takes no interest in scriptures and rules of life, is a shudra." The higher the varna, the more rules of self-discipline are to be observed. Hence, a jati could collectively improve its status by adopting more demanding rules of conduct, e.g. vegetarianism.

A person's second name usually indicates his jati or gotra. Further, one can use the following varna titles: Sharma (shelter, or joy) indicates the brahmin, Varma (armour) the kshatriya, Gupta (protected) the vaishya and Das (servant) the shudra. In a single family, one person may call himself Gupta (varna), another Agrawal (jati), yet another Garg (gotra). A monk, upon renouncing the world, sheds his name along with his caste identity.

Untouchability

Below the caste hierarchy are the untouchables, or harijan (literally "God's people"), dalits ("oppressed"), paraiah (one such caste in South India), or scheduled castes. They make up about 16% of the Indian population, as many as the upper castes combined.

Untouchability originates in the belief that evil spirits surround dead and dying substances. People who work with corpses, body excretions or animal skins had an aura of danger and impurity, so they were kept away from mainstream society and from sacred learning and ritual. This often took grotesque forms: thus, an untouchable had to announce his polluting proximity with a rattle, like a leper.

Untouchability is unknown in the Vedas, and therefore repudiated by neo-Vedic reformers like Dayanand Saraswati, Narayan Guru, Gandhiji and Savarkar. In 1967, Dr. Ambedkar, a dalit by birth and fierce critic of social injustice in Hinduism and Islam, led a mass conversion to Buddhism, partly on the (unhistorical) assumption that Buddhism had been an anti-caste movement. The 1950 constitution outlawed untouchability and sanctioned positive discrimination programs for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Lately, the Vishva Hindu Parishad has managed to get even the most traditionalist religious leaders on the anti-untouchability platform, so that they invite harijans to Vedic schools and train them as priests. In the villages, however, pestering of dalits is still a regular phenomenon, occasioned less by ritual purity issues than by land and labor disputes. However, the dalits' increasing political clout is accelerating the elimination of untouchability.

Caste Conversion

In the Mahabharata, Yuddhishthira affirms that varna is defined by the qualities of head and heart, not by one's birth. Krishna teaches that varna is defined by one's activity (karma) and quality (guna). Till today, it is an unfinished debate to what extent one's "quality" is determined by heredity or by environmental influence. And so, while the hereditary view has been predominant for long, the non-hereditary conception of varna has always been around as well, as is clear from the practice of varna conversion. The most famous example is the 17th-century freedom fighter Shivaji, a shudra who was accorded kshatriya status to match his military achievements. The geographical spread of Vedic tradition was achieved through large-scale initiation of local elites into the varna order. From 1875 onwards, the Arya Samaj has

systematically administered the "purification ritual" (shuddhi) to Muslim and Christian converts and to low-caste Hindus, making the dwija. Conversely, the present policy of positive discrimination has made upper-caste people seek acceptance into the favored Scheduled Castes.

Veer Savarkar, the ideologue of Hindu nationalism, advocated intermarriage to unify the Hindu nation even at the biological level. Most contemporary Hindus, though now generally opposed to caste inequality, continue to marry within their respective jati because they see no reason for their dissolution.

Racial Theory of Caste

Nineteenth-century Westerners projected the colonial situation and the newest race theories on the caste system: the upper castes were white invaders lording it over the black natives. This outdated view is still repeated ad-nauseam by anti-Hindu authors: now that "idolatry" has lost its force as a term of abuse, "racism" is a welcome innovation to demonize Hinduism. In reality, India is the region where all skin color types met and mingled, and you will find many brahmins as black as Nelson Mandela. Ancient "Aryan" heroes like Rama, Krishna, Draupadi, Ravana (a brahmin) and a number of Vedic seers were explicitly described as being dark-skinned.

But doesn't varna mean "skin color?" The effective meaning of varna is "splendor, color," and hence "distinctive quality" or "one segment in a spectrum." The four functional classes constitute the "colors" in the spectrum of society. Symbolic colors are allotted to the varna on the basis of the cosmological scheme of "three qualities" (triguna): white is sattva (truthful), the quality typifying the brahmin; red is rajas (energetic), for the kshatriya; black is tamas (inert, solid), for the shudra; yellow is allotted to the vaishya, who is defined by a mixture of qualities.

Finally, caste society has been the most stable society in history. Indian communists used to sneer that "India has never even had a revolution." Actually, that is no mean achievement.

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Swami Sivananda (Divine Life Society)

VARNASRAMA DHARMA

The principle of Varnasrama Dharma is one of the basic principles of Hinduism. The Varnasrama system is peculiar to Hindus. It is a characteristic feature of Hinduism. It is also prevalent throughout the world according to Guna-Karma (aptitude and conduct), though there is no such distinct denomination of this kind, elsewhere.

The duties of the castes are Varna Dharma. The four castes are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. The duties of the stages in life are Asrama Dharma. The four Asramas or orders of life are Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa.

THE PRINCIPLE

Human society is like a huge machine. The individuals and communities are like its parts. If the parts are weak and broken, the machine will not work. A machine is nothing without its parts. The human body also can work efficiently if its parts and organs are in sound and strong condition. If there is pain in any part of the body, if there is disease in any organ or part of the body, this human machine will go out of order. It will not perform its usual function or work.

So is the case with the human society. Every individual should perform his duties efficiently. The Hindu Rishis and sages formed an ideal scheme of society and an ideal way of individual life, which is known by the name Varnasrama Dharma. Hinduism is built on Varnasrama Dharma. The structure of the Hindu society is based on Varnasrama Dharma. Observance of Varnasrama Dharma helps one's growth and self-evolution. It is very indispensable. If the rules are violated, the society will soon perish.

The aim of Varnasrama Dharma is to promote the development of the universal, eternal Dharma. If you defend Dharma, it will defend you. If you destroy it, it will destroy you. Therefore, never destroy your Dharma. This principle holds true of the individual as much as of the nation. It is Dharma alone which keeps a nation alive. Dharma is the very soul of man. Dharma is the very soul of a nation also.

In the West and in the whole world also, there is Varnasrama, though it is not rigidly observed there. Some Western philosophers have made a division of three classes, viz., philosophers, warriors and masses. The philosophers correspond to the Brahmanas, warriors to Kshatriyas and the masses to Vaisyas and Sudras. This system is indispensable to keep the society in a state of perfect harmony and order.

THE FOUR CASTES

In Purusha-Sukta of the Rig-Veda, there is reference to the division of Hindu society into four classes. It is described there that the Brahmanas came out of the face of the Lord, the Creator, Kshatriyas from His arms, Vaisyas from His thighs, and the Sudras from His feet.

This division is according to the Guna and Karma. Guna (quality) and Karma (kind of work) determine the caste of a man. This is supported by Lord Krishna in the Gita, also. He says in the Gita: "The four castes were emanated by Me, by the different distribution of qualities and actions. Know Me to be the author of them, though the actionless and inexhaustible" (Ch. IV-13).

There are three qualities or Gunas, viz., *Sattva* (purity), *Rajas* (passion) and *Tamas* (inertia). Sattva is white, Rajas is red and Tamas is black. These three qualities are found in man in varying proportions. Sattva preponderates in some persons. They are Brahmanas. They are wise persons or thinkers. They are the priests, ministers or philosophers who guide kings or rulers. In some, Rajas is predominant. They are Kshatriyas. They are warriors or men of action. They fight with the enemies or invaders and defend the country. In some, Tamas is predominant. They are Vaisyas or traders. They do business and agriculture and amass wealth. Sudras are the servants. None of these qualities is highly developed in them. They serve the other three castes.

In a broad sense, a Sattvic man, who is pious and virtuous and leads the divine life, is a Brahmana, a Rajasic man with heroic quality is a Kshatriya, a Rajasic man with business tendencies is a Vaisya and a Tamasic man is a Sudra. Hitler and Mussolini were Kshatriyas. Ford was a Vaisya.

Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, and also, uprightness, knowledge, Realisation and belief in God are the duties of the Brahmanas, born of (their own) nature. Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, and also, not flying from battle, generosity and lordliness are the duties of the Kshatriyas, born of (their own) nature. Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade are the duties of the Vaisyas, born of (their own) nature. And action consisting of service is the duty of the Sudras, born of (their own) nature.

The Law of Spiritual Economics

The underlying principle in caste system or Varna Dharma, is division of labour. Rishis studied human nature carefully. They came to the conclusion that all men were not equally fit for all kinds of work. Hence, they found it necessary to allocate different kinds of duties to different classes of people, according to their aptitude, capacity or quality. The Brahmanas were in charge of spiritual and intellectual affairs. The work of political administration and defence was given to the Kshatriyas. The Vaisyas were entrusted with the duty of supplying food for the nation and administering its economic welfare. The Sudras did menial work. The Rishis felt all these needs of the Hindu nation and started the system of Varnas and Asramas.

This division of labour began in Vedic times. The Vedas taught that the Brahmana was the brain of the society, the Kshatriya its arms, the Vaisya its stomach, and the Sudra its feet.

There was a quarrel between the senses, the mind and the Prana as to who was superior. There was a quarrel amongst the different organs and the stomach. If the hands quarrel with the stomach; the entire body will suffer. When Prana departed from the body, all the organs suffered.

The head or stomach cannot claim its superiority over the feet and hands. The hands and feet are as much important as the stomach or head. If there is quarrel between the different castes as to which is superior, then the entire social fabric will suffer. There will be disharmony, rupture and discord. A scavenger and a barber are as much important as aminister for the running of the society. The social edifice is built on the law of spiritual economics. It has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. Each class contributes its best to the common weal or world-solidarity. There is no question of higher and lower here.

Character Determines Caste

A Brahmana is no Brahmana if he is not endowed with purity and good character, and if he leads a life of dissipation and immorality. A Sudra is a Brahmana if he leads a virtuous and pious life. What a great soul was Vidura! What a noble, candid, straightforward student was Satyakama Jabala of Chhandogya Upanishad! Caste is a question of character. Varna is no more the colour of the skin, but the colour of one's character or quality. Conduct and character count and not lineage alone. If one is Brahmana by birth and, at the same time, if he possesses the virtues of a Brahmana, it is extremely good, because certain virtuous qualifications only determine the birth of a Brahmana.

Use and Abuse of the Caste System

The Hindus have survived many a foreign conquest on account of their caste system. But they have developed class jealousies and hatred in the name of the caste system. They have not got the spirit of co-operation. That is the reason why they are weak and disunited today. They have become sectarians in the name of the caste system. Hence there is degradation in India.

The caste system is, indeed, a splendid thing. It is quite flawless. But the defect came in from somewhere else. The classes gradually neglected their duties. The test of ability and character slowly vanished. Birth became the chief consideration in determining castes. All castes fell from their ideals and forgot all about their duties. Brahmanas became selfish and claimed superiority over others by mere birth, without possessing due qualifications. The Kshatriyas lost their chivalry and spirit of sacrifice. The Vaisyas became very greedy. They did not earn wealth by honest means. They did not look after the economic welfare of the people. They did not give charity. They also lost the spirit of sacrifice. Sudras gave up service. They became officers. They wished that others should serve them. The greed and pride of man have created discord and disharmony.

There is nothing wrong in Varnasrama. It is arrogance and haughtiness in men that have brought troubles. Man or the little Jiva is imperfect. He is full of defects. He is simply waiting for claiming superiority over others. The Brahmana thinks that the other three castes are inferior to him. The Kshatriya thinks that the Vaisya and Sudra are inferior to him. A rich Sudra thinks that he is superior to a poor Brahmana or a poor Kshatriya or Vaisya.

At the present moment, the Varnasrama system exists in name only. It has to be rebuilt properly. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, who have fallen from their ideals and who are not doing their respective duties, must do their respective duties properly. They must be educated on

right lines. They must raise themselves to their original lofty level. The sectarian spirit must die. They should develop a new understanding heart of love and devotion, with a spirit of co-operation, sacrifice and service.